

British-Chagossian households in Greater Manchester

24/03/2025

In 2022, new legislation expanded eligibility for British citizenship to all direct descendants of Chagossians, meaning that many British-Chagossians can now settle in the UK. Information on this application route can be found on the government website here: [Apply for British citizenship as a person of Chagossian descent - GOV.UK](#).

This briefing is designed for individuals and organisations supporting newly arrived British-Chagossian households in Greater Manchester (GM) and includes:

1. A short political context of the Chagos islands
2. Chagossian Identity and Culture
3. Households in Greater Manchester
4. The immigration status of British-Chagossian households
5. Public funds eligibility for Chagossian households

A short political context of the Chagos islands

The Chagos archipelago is made up of more than 60 islands, located in the central Indian ocean. In the 1960s, the UK government separated the Chagos Archipelago from colonial Mauritius, forming the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Between 1965 and 1973, Chagossians were forcibly removed from all the inhabited Chagos islands to allow the establishment of a US military base on Diego Garcia, the largest of the Chagos Islands.¹ By 1973, the entire population (approximately 1,500–2,000 residents) had been displaced, mostly to Mauritius and the Seychelles.²

With no resettlement assistance, Chagossians in Mauritius and the Seychelles faced extreme poverty, unemployment, and a lack of access to health services, education, food, sanitation and housing. Reports indicate that Chagossian communities today still face racial discrimination and linked social and economic inequalities.³

Chagossian identity and culture

Ethnicity: Chagossians, also known as the Ilois, can trace their origins on the islands to African, Malagasy and Indian slaves who were brought by the French to the Chagos Islands in the late 1700s. Most Chagossians in the UK are descendants of the native islanders but were born and brought up in Mauritius.

Language and literacy: Chagossians speak Mauritian Creole, a French-based language. While all understand French and many can speak it, proficiency in English varies, and a large proportion of Chagossians may have limited literacy in any language.

¹ [The Unspoken Story Of The Chagossians - The Borgen Project](#)

² [Human Rights Watch Report 2023](#)

³ [Human Rights Watch Report 2023](#)

Religion: Chagossians are mostly of Roman Catholic faith, and nearly all are Christians. However, there is some religious diversity within the cohort so this should not be assumed.

Diet: The Chagossian diet is based on Mauritian cuisine which is a blend of Indian, Chinese and Creole influences, with rice as a staple. Chagossian cuisine is fish and coconut based, with biryani, noodles and egg fried rice also being popular.

Households in Greater Manchester

Some British-Chagossians have been able to settle in the UK from 2002, and many have arrived in Greater Manchester independently since then. Notably, a well-established community exists in Wythenshawe, so some new arrivals may choose to join family and friends there.

Recently, British-Chagossians have arrived in the UK in larger, organised groups. In September 2024, approximately 16 British-Chagossian households arrived at Manchester airport to live and settle in the UK, and were supported into homelessness accommodation across GM and the wider North West. In March 2025, a further 127 British-Chagossian households arrived at Manchester airport. While some were dispersed across the country, at least 82 households remain in Greater Manchester and are likely to settle here.

As these arrivals are not part of any national or supported resettlement scheme, the households have been provided access to normal homelessness pathways where needed, to access accommodation and support.

Most of the 82 households are families with children and are currently being accommodated in homelessness accommodation by GM LAs. At least six households are being supported by each LA with some boroughs, including Manchester, accommodating significantly more.

It is likely that other British-Chagossians will arrive independently in Manchester, now or in the future. This may happen sporadically, in smaller numbers and without any notice to local authorities. If such households present to your organisation and are in need of homelessness support, it will be **important to inform the local authority of their background**.

The immigration status of British-Chagossian households

British-Chagossians

The 2002 British Overseas Territories Act granted access to citizenship to some island-born Chagossians, and their children born between 1969 and 1983.⁴ The 2022 Nationality and Borders Act expanded eligibility to apply for British and/or British Overseas Territory citizenship to all direct Chagossian descendants, without an application fee. The time-limited process opened on 23 November 2022, with all

⁴ [Our Citizenship Campaign - Chagossian Voices](#)

adults needing to make the application within 5 years, and under-18s having until the age of 23 to decide if they wish to apply under this route.⁵ Chagossians and their descendants with British citizenship are not subject to immigration control and enjoy the same rights and entitlements as other British citizens.

Mauritian nationals

Many British-Chagossian households in GM contain one or more household member(s) who is a Mauritian national, who does not qualify for the British citizenship route. They have typically joined their British-Chagossian spouses to come to the UK and on arrival have been granted Leave Outside the Rules (LOTR), subject to the discretion of border force agents. LOTR is granted by the Home Office in exceptional circumstances, allowing individuals who do not meet standard visa requirements to remain in the UK due to humanitarian, medical or compassionate reasons.

Mauritian nationals in this cohort appear to have received LOTR for a limited period of 3 or 6 months with a No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition. Some Mauritians have been granted the right to work, but others have not. If they want to remain in the country beyond this time, they **will need to access immigration advice** to make alternative applications before their Leave expires. However, routes to regularisation are limited.

Access to and eligibility for services

Universal Credit

British Chagossians are eligible for Universal Credit. Mauritian national household members who are subject to NRPF will not be considered in the claim.

The Habitual Residence Test (HRT) shouldn't be a barrier to British Chagossian households' claims, and a dedicated team has been formed within the DWP to expedite their cases. To ensure that the families pass HRT in the first claim period they must declare they were living outside the UK in the last 2 years. During the Universal Credit application, when asked '*which country did you live in before you arrived in the UK?*', they should select Mauritius or the Seychelles. This will trigger a referral to the specialist team within HRT who are dealing with Chagossian claims.

Adult skills fund (ASF) courses

Courses funded by the adult skills fund (ASF) are wide ranging, including ESOL and advanced vocational training for learners aged 19 and over.

British-Chagossians are exempt from the 3-year residency requirement rule and therefore have an eligible residency status to access ASF funded courses.

Individuals with Leave Outside the Rules (LOTR) who have been ordinarily resident in the UK since they were given Leave, also have an eligible residency status to

⁵ [Nationality and Borders Bill: Chagossian nationality factsheet - GOV.UK](#)

access ASF funded courses. Therefore, Mauritian national household members, who have been granted LOTR, have an eligible residency status to access ASF funded courses.

Please note that the NRPF condition attached to the LOTR of Mauritian nationals in this cohort, does not affected their eligibility for ASF funded courses, as public funds do not include education or education funding.